

Drew Gilpin Faust

Historian to Shape Harvard's Future

By DEEPANJALI KAKATI

History is an integral part of Drew Gilpin Faust's life. The eminent historian and academic leader spends a lot of time studying people who are remembered for making a mark and showing the way. In February, Faust entered the history books herself when she was chosen as the first woman president of Harvard University.

When Faust becomes the 28th president of America's oldest university on July 1, it will be the first time that four of the eight Ivy League schools—Harvard, Brown, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania—will be run by women. The eight private colleges and universities in the Ivy League are considered the most prestigious higher education institutions in the United States.

"I've spent a lot of time thinking about the past, and about how it shapes the future....Our shared enterprise is to make Harvard's future even more remarkable than its past," said Faust in a speech after her appointment was announced.

Harvard is on the verge of adopting a new college curriculum "that promises more coherence, more choice, and more excitement in undergraduate education. We have just received a faculty report calling for renewed and enhanced dedication to teach-

ing," said Faust, an expert on the Civil War and the American South.

But if Harvard is to accomplish all that it intends, it needs to break down barriers that inhibit collaboration among schools or among disciplines, barriers that divide the sciences and the humanities, she said.

According to an American Council on Education study in 2006, 23 percent of college presidents were women. "While that percentage has increased from 9.5 percent in 1986, it is clear that women are still under-represented in this realm of academia," the American Association of University Women said in a comment on the study.

Yet because more than half of all U.S. university presidents in 2006 were older than 60, compared with 14 percent in 1986, the future for women's leadership in academia is considered promising. "A potential wave of retirements means there is an opportunity to create greater diversity in the [university] presidency," says Jacqueline E. King, director of the American Council on Education's Center for Policy Analysis.

"It's important," said Faust in an interview with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), "that that I'm the president of Harvard, not the woman president of Harvard."

Yet, she said, her appointment does symbolize "impor-

tant changes in the place of women in higher education, the place of women in public life, the place of women in America, and the world more generally. But it's more than me," she emphasized. "I mean, I'm the symbol. But the reality that lies behind it is much broader than Harvard, or me, or even higher education."

Faust has served since 2001 as the founding dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard. Before coming to Harvard, she spent 25 years on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, where she had also headed the women's studies program. After the announcement of her new position, she told a news conference, "Young women have come up to me and said this is really an inspiration. So I think it would be wrong not to acknowledge that this has tremendous symbolic importance."

"I hope my appointment can be one symbol of an opportu-

nity that would have been inconceivable even a generation ago," she added.

Speaking about the challenges ahead, Faust said on PBS that there are many contradictions in how Americans have regarded universities. "We love them and hate them at the same time. We want to get our children into them. We struggle and strive to do that."

Drew Gilpin Faust (center in black), with Nell Booth, executive assistant to Bryn Mawr College's president, (left in red) is followed by reporters at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania just before Harvard chose her as its first female president.



And yet, at the same time, we say they're hidebound and they're not well-managed."


She feels that, while what Harvard does in this next decade will serve as an important part of the answer to these contradictions and challenges, it will also help to define the "character and meaning of universities for the 21st century—whether they can be supple enough, enterprising enough, ambitious enough to accomplish all that is expected of them—and no less important, whether they can do so while preserving their unique culture of inquiry and debate in a world that seems increasingly polarized into unassailable certainties."

Faust, who was born Catherine Gilpin, grew up in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. She attended Concord Academy in Massachusetts and received her bachelor's degree from Bryn Mawr in 1968. She graduated magna cum laude with honors in history, and earned her master's degree (1971) and doctorate (1975) in American civilization from the University of Pennsylvania.

Faust's sixth book, *The*

Republic of Suffering, due for release in 2008, explores the impact of the Civil War's enormous death toll on the lives of 19th century Americans. Her previous book, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (1996) won an award from the Society of American Historians as best nonfiction book on an American theme.

Faust rebelled at an early age against the widespread racial discrimination of the time and the secondary role she was expected to play as a female. When she was nine, she wrote President Dwight D. Eisenhower, urging him to end racial segregation.

The only daughter in a family of four children, Faust wrote in a later autobiographical essay, "I was the rebel who did not just march for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, but who fought endlessly with my mother, refusing to accept her insistence that 'this is a man's world, sweetie, and the sooner you learn that the better off you'll be.'" 

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